DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 214 112 CS 006 526

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TITLE Implementing PCRP: Fact or Fiction? Communication Skills.
INSTITUTION Pennsylvania State Dept. of Education, Harrisburg.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 16p.; One of a series of PCRP publications. The report lists the accomplishments of Project CARES (Communication Arts Resource and Educational Services).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Experiential Learning; *Language Arts; *Language Processing; Listening Skills; *Modeling (Psychology); Principals; Program Descriptions; Program Evaluation; Reading Instruction; Speech Skills; Sustained Silent Reading; Teacher Improvement; *Teaching Methods; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Pennsylvania Comprehensive Read Commun Arts Plan

ABSTRACT

The Pennsylvania Comprehensive Reading/Communication Arts Plan (PCRP) is a language arts curriculum providing four critical experiences that all students need in order to become competent in reading, writing, listening, and speaking: responding to literature, sustained silent reading, oral and written composing, and investigating and mastering language patterns. An implementation model was developed to allow maximum impact of the program, in which the school principal models sustained silent reading and sustained writing in the classrooms and designs schedules to allow frequent teacher team meetings and inservice sessions. In providing the four critical experiences for students, teachers focus on facilitating student learning, with the belief that teachers can positively affect the learning of their students. Assessment of the reading and writing achievement in pilot PCRP classes at the elementary school level indicates significant gains in both areas, and subsequent research will be conducted with PCRP students at the secondary school level. Current results indicate positive effects for implementation of PCRP, but the most convincing evidence that the program has made a difference for students is the teachers' growth in reading, writing, speaking, and listening when working with their students in this approach. (HTH)

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IMPLEMENTING PCRP

Fact or Fiction?

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By Dr. Marion Rosecky,
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Winter 1982

CS006526

The Goals of Quality Education

This publication directly addresses the goal of communication skills.

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The Goals of Quality Education

This publication directly addresses the goal of communication skills.

School Improvement

This publication should be particularly useful to School Improvement districts which plan to implement curricular and instructional development or improvement programs in communication skills.

Preface

This is one of a series of publications that emanate from, further define, and employ the Pennsylvania Reading/Communication Arts Plan (PCRP) for the purpose of improving curriculum, instruction and student achievement.

Project CARES (Communication Arts Resource and Educational Services) is a project designed to develop an effective implementation model which should result in significant improvement in student achievement. This report explains what has been learned and accomplished in the three years that project has been in operation.

What this project and experiences in hundreds of schools across the Commonwealth have taught us are that PCRP cannot be implemented as an add-on and that it must be fully and properly implemented to yield the benefits of improved student achievement and attitudes.

John L. Meehan

JM/py

IMPLEMENTING PCRP: FACT OR FICTION?

Alex, principal of a rural middle school, glanced at the wall clock and saw that it was now five minutes to ten. He grabbed his half-finished copy of Theory Z and hurried down the hall to a nearby social studies class. Taking an empty seat, he joined the teacher and students in twenty minutes of Sustained Silent Reading (an activity that fosters the habit of reading, by having students read a book of their choice for increasing periods of time, on a regular basis). Later in the day he would join another class for ten minutes of Sustained Writing (an activity that fosters the practice of writing). Alex is modeling. Rather than talk about the importance of reading and writing to teachers and students, he is engaging in the class activity to set an example.

Why is his behavior significant? It is significant because he is providing some of the leadership that is necessary to successfully implement the Pennsylvania Comprehensive Reading/Communication Arts Plan in any school.[1]

What is PCRP?

In June 1976, the Pennsylvania Department of Education sent the PCRP to all school district superintendents. This communication arts curriculum, selected from many that had been submitted, was based on a model of health, (i.e., what makes the competent reader and writer?) using findings from much of the research on students' achievement in communication skills. The Plan suggests that teachers provide four critical experiences that all students need in order to become competent in reading, writing, listening and speaking: (1) Responding to Literature, (2) Sustained Silent Reading of Self-Selected Books, (3) Composing: Oral and Written, and (4) Investigation and Mastery of Language Patterns. Because these experiences are embedded in all subject areas, students' mastery of subject matter through reading and listening and their ability to express themselves effectively in writing and speaking, is greatly enhanced.

Implementing the PCRP assumes a shared responsibility among teachers, students, administrators and parents. Schools that have been the most successful in implementing the Plan have had one critical ingredient, and that is a principal and a team of teachers who share the initial leadership for implementation.

Why a need to develop an Implementation Model?

Because the Plan provided flexibility and ownership to teachers and principals, it soon gained wide support throughout Pennsylvania. However, there was a need for an implementation model to be developed that was stable enough to be consistent in diverse instructional settings, as well as provide the needed evidence that PCRP could make a significant impact on student learning.

There was also a need to use what we know about making effective instructional change in school settings. It is difficult to bring this about in any school.[2] An ethnographic documentation,[3] completed in the first year of developing the CARES[4] Implementation Model, concluded that major problems in PCRP implementation would most likely stem from (1) a lack of principal leadership and (2) a superficial understanding of PCRP. Would teachers and principals see the four critical experiences as "activities" to be added on during the school day or would they see them as the basic processes for learning in all subject areas?

Project CARES, funded under a Title IV-C grant since 1978, and administered by Intermediate Unit #24 in Chester County, has developed a PCRP Implementation Model with the help of twenty-eight pilot schools representing diverse school settings, populations and age groups. Eighteen of the schools are in Chester County and ten schools are in southwestern Pennsylvania, under Intermediate Unit #1.

The CARES Implementation Model

To provide some stability for the organizational change process, the project guidelines for implementation of PCRP were designed to incorporate five factors that facilitate effective change:[5] (1) a clear understanding of PCRP; (2) administrative support; (3) in-service on PCRP, (4) needed materials; and (5) a continuing interactive system within schools and districts.

Each of the pilot schools formed a Building Leadership Team, led by the principal of the school, that developed a yearly plan for their school and shared implementation activities with the rest of the school staff. Gradually, whole schools became involved. Eventually, some school districts designed a districtwide curriculum based on PCRP to encourage a K-12 effort.

The documentation of the implementation process was accomplished through several different perspectives; ethnographic, third-party, CARES staff logs, school team logs and project director evaluation. Over a period of three years, certain patterns emerged that appeared to show the differences between "successful" and "unsuccessful" schools. Successful schools, i.e., schools that were effectively implementing PCRP, all had certain characteristics. These "facts" or "features" were seen in four areas: (1) in principal leadership, (2) in team leadership, (3) in the instructional process and (4) in the impact on student learning.

Features of Principal Leadership

There were many individual styles of leadership among the pilot school principals but some or all of the following six features could be observed in their leadership:

1. Modeling Sustained Silent Reading. The principal kept a book he was reading close at hand so that he could include himself in classroom or schoolwide S.S.R. One high school principal I know read in the

main hallway outside of his office during schoolwide Sustained Silent Reading. Not only students, but school visitors were impressed with his willingness to take time to model.

2. Modeling Sustained Writing. Again, the principal joined in with journal writing, the most prevalent form used in this activity. Some principals brought to a classroom a letter or a report that they were working on. Their example of writing many drafts (sometimes a messy process), was not lost on the students. Students needed to see writers at work.

3. Making needed schedule changes. Scheduling for the year's classes is a major headache for administrators responsible for putting it together. This is especially true for secondary schools. Even with the help of a computer, just one schedule change can create a week's work. But part of the process in implementing a curriculum, such as PCRP, is to find time to schedule team meetings, schedule in-service sessions, and schedule schoolwide S.S.R. Several pilot school principals have had to wait a year to build PCRP instruction into the school schedule. According to their testimony, the long delay has been worth it.

Other characteristics of principal leadership were: encouraging parent involvement, participating in team meetings and attending PCRP in-service along with the teachers.

What was it that brought about principal commitment to PCRP implementation? According to one survey of pilot schools principals completed at the end of Year Two, there were three things that fostered commitment; seeing the positive impact PCRP's had on their teachers' attitude toward teaching language arts, seeing the positive impact that the PCRP's critical experiences had on students, and making the goals of PCRP coincide with the school's instructional goals. PCRP implementation helped make a school accountable to the school board, to parents and the community. It was perceived as a plan that worked.

Features of Team Leadership

The Building Leadership Team had the responsibility of developing and implementing the school's yearly implementation plan. The team usually consisted of five to nine teachers led by the school principal. The principal had to not only select the team members, but had to maintain team effectiveness by rotating membership among the school staff.

It was perhaps in the individual actions of a team member that we could see most clearly the features of team leadership. The first of these was: (1) helping to develop the school implementation plan as a collaborative effort. Such things as attending the team meetings, and working to keep the team meetings productive were necessary; (2) A second feature was, accepting responsibility for continual learning about PCRP. Understanding and working through the holistic philosophy of PCRP could not be accomplished quickly. Learning that the four critical experiences pervade all subjects taught and that the learning continuum for students is an experiential one, were concepts that were new for some teachers or were affirmations of existing beliefs for others. Either could be the basis for the third characteristic which was (3) to implement PCRP in their own classroom. When some PCRP instructional strategies were tried, and were established at a fairly routine level of use, a team member would be ready for a fourth action which was to share student-made materials and teaching strategies with the rest of the faculty. Teachers were often more willing to try things that other teachers shared with them. What was needed was a climate of collaborative effort among the faculty. Quite often, the principal helped to foster this.

Features of the Instructional Process

In providing the four critical experiences for students - in any grade or in any subject - the first feature was the teacher's focus on facilitating student learning. Student experiences were primary. Such experiences as:

- hearing literature
- reading, discussing and responding to literature
- reading and sharing self-selected books
- talking for a purpose; reading poetry aloud, planning a project, practicing for a formal speech, discussing drafts - before, during and after writing the piece
- speaking and writing to shape and express information in content areas
- reading for information
- listening more skillfully in note taking and discussion
- writing in journals

could easily be observed in PCRP classes.

Curriculum materials and grouping arrangements were used to support these experiences not supplant them. For teachers that meant:

- reading aloud to students frequently
- using basal programs selectively
- developing comprehension and appreciation skills through many responding activities
- using four comprehension perspectives in discussions (creative, literal, interpretive, evaluative)
- using small-group structures more frequently
- focusing on the writing process
- improving student's writing with the conferencing technique
- helping students compose and express their knowledge in subject areas
- helping students read textbooks and take tests more efficiently
- learning to widen their means of observing student learning.

The second feature of the instructional process that emerged in PCRP implementation was the belief that a teacher could positively affect the learning of his or her students, even the most reluctant student. This characteristic is called efficacy. In a recent study on staff development and school change, efficacy was found to have one of the strongest, most positive relationships to the outcome of a curriculum change project.[6]

Teacher sense of efficacy was positively related to the percent of project goals achieved, the amount of teacher change, total improved student performance and the continuation of both project methods and materials. Teachers' attitudes about their own professional competence, in short, appear to have major influence on what happens to change-agent projects and how effective they are.[7]

Evidence that teachers implementing PCRP were developing this sense of efficacy, came primarily from the three-year ethnographic documentation, although principals and CARES staff members observed this phenomenon as well. The following is taken from the ethnographer's first-year report, based on six months of weekly observations in four pilot schools and on PCRP in-service sessions:

> ('en the cruciality of teachers to the success of any attempt at curriculum reform, such as that represented by the introduction of PCRP, our findings under this focus may well be the most significant of the study. . . . Our investigation and analysis has. . . indicated a close relationship between serious implementation of the plan and the ideology of education exhibited by teachers. Specifically it reflects a certain view of children, of learning a'd of teaching. Major Findings 1: Serious commitment by teachers to t'e PCRP implies a view of children as inexhorable learners, not simply as potential learners. They don't have to be coerced or motivated to learn. They are more than simply repositories to competencies that can be increased, enriched and measured.[8]

Features of PCRP's Impact on Students

The major goals of the PCRP are:

- to advance students' competence in reading and listening and in oral and written expression

- to nurture positive attitudes toward reading and effective use of language

Obtaining evidence concerning PCRP's effect on student achievement and attitudes was delayed until we could develop a configuration of a PCRP teacher. The Levels of Use Structured Interview,[9] developed by the Resource and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas at Austin, was selected as the tool for identifying the extent to which a teacher was implementing PCRP. In Project Year Three, 1980-81, we compared student achievement in writing, between classrooms using minimal PCRP strategies and those classes where the teacher had implemented PCRP to a Routine (or higher) Level of Use and the reading achievement of PCRP students with the national norm group.

Reading Achievement

The norm-referenced Metroplitan Reading Test was used to assess reading achievement in 14 PCRP classes, grades 2, 3 and 4. In grades 2 and 4 the PCRP students gained at a rate similar to the national norm group. In grade 3, the PCRP students gained at a rate significantly greater than the national norm group.

Writing Ability

Students' writing ability was evaluated with the McCaig Writing Evaluation Model[11] which assesses a student's writing performance on a 1 to 7 scale. Levels 1 - 2 indicate Poor writing performance. Levels 3, 4 and 5 indicate Competent writing, and Levels 6 and 7 indicate Superior writing performance.

A twenty-minute sample of writing was collected in the Fall and in the Spring from 456 students in grades 2, 3 and 4. A double-blind procedure was employed, in that raters did not know if the paper being read was pre or post, PCRP or contrast group.

Tables I, II and III[11] show that the adjusted post writing performance of PCRP students was significantly higher than that of the contrast groups in all three grades.

TABLE I
COMPARISON OF PCRP STUDENTS AND CONTRAST GROUP
SECOND GRADE STUDENTS ON FALL TO SPRING WRITING IMPROVEMENT

Group	N	Pre-Mean	Post-Mean	Adjusted Post-Mean	"F" Ratio
PCRP	99	3.89	5.38	5.28	40.51*
Contrast	58	3.43	3.86	4.04	

* Significant at .01 level

TABLE II
COMPARISON OF PCRP STUDENTS AND CONTRAST GROUP
THIRD GRADE STUDENTS ON FALL TO SPRING WRITING IMPROVEMENT

Group	N	Pre-Mean	Post-Mean	Adjusted Post-Mean	"F" Ratio
PCRP	89	4.15	4.80	4.47	9.63*
Contrast	47	2.79	3.15	3.78	

* Significant at .01 level

TABLE III
COMPARISON OF PCRP STUDENTS AND CONTRAST GROUP
FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS ON FALL TO SPRING WRITING IMPROVEMENT

Group	N	Pre-Mean	Post-Mean	Adjusted Post-Mean	"F" Ratio
PCRP	101	4.03	4.98	4.53	25.56*
Contrast	71	2.48	2.96	3.59	

* Significant at .01 level

Students were also compared in certain primary traits of writing such as readability, movement in thought, embedding language skills, spelling, sentence sense, vocabulary and sentence structure. Again, the PCRP students gained more than non-PCRP students as Tables IV, V, and VI indicate.[12]

TABLE IV

Trait	Group	N	Gain	No Gain
	PCRP	24	22	2
Readability	Non-PCRP	14	6	8
Movement in	PCRP	5	5	0
Thought	Non-PCRP	12	4	8
Completed	PCRP	35	31	4
Story	Non-PCRP	29	6	23
Non-basic	PCRP	59	46	13
Sentences	Non-PCRP	34	3	31
	PCRP	97	39	58
Embedding	Non-PCRP	55	5	50

In grade 2, the gain of PCRP students exceeded the gain of non-PCRP students in every trait at the .01 level of confidence.

TABLE V

Trait	Group	N	Gain	No Gain
	PCRP	5	4	1
Readability	Non-PCRP	9	1	8
Language	PCRP	16	6	10
Skills	Non-PCRP	20	4	16
Completed	PCRP	39	19	20
Message	Non-PCRP	41	18	23
Sentence	PCRP	46	12	34
Sense	Non-PCRP	45	4	41
	PCRP	62	19	43
Vocabulary	Non-PCRP	52	4	48

In grade 3, the gain of PCRP students exceeded the gain of non-PCRP students in readability, sentence sense, and vocabulary.

TABLE VI

Trait	Group	N	Gain	No Gain
Completed	PCRP	4	3	1
Message	Non-PCRP	15	6	9
	PCRP	23	14	9
Spelling	Non-PCRP	55	12	43
Sentence	PCRP	46	23	23
Sense	Non-PCRP	55	10	45
	PCRP	51	34	17
Vocabulary	Non-PCRP	66	8	58
Sentence	PCRP	53	29	24
Structure	Non-PCRP	62	1	61

In grade 4, the gain of the PCRP students exceeded the gain of non-PCRP students in spelling, sentence sense, vocabulary, and sentence structure.

In 1981-82, this study is being repeated with 30 classes, grades 2, 3 and 4. Subsequent research will be conducted with secondary students and we will be looking at students' attitude change toward reading and writing as well.

These "facts" or "features" of PCRP implementation are encouraging. However, the most convincing evidence that PCRP has made a difference for our students may be the most difficult to discern. And that is <u>our own growth</u> in reading, writing, speaking and listening when we work with our students to facilitate their learning.

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Document Name:
A4771

Requestor's ID:
RJK

Author's Name:
meehan

Document Comments:
report for publication / draft / 2/5/82